

## REVIEWS.

I. *The Evidential Value of Certain Mediumistic Phenomena.* By E. J. DINGWALL. *Psyche*, October 1928.

This article is in fact an attack on the work of a group (as Mr. Dingwall calls it) of S.P.R. workers who have published somewhat largely in our *Proceedings*, but whose methods as psychical researchers have not had the good fortune to meet with Mr. Dingwall's approval. The particular cases he has selected for comment seem to be three in number: (a) A series of cross-correspondences expounded by Mr. J. G. Piddington in a paper entitled "One Crowded Hour of Glorious Life" (see *Proceedings*, vol. xxxvi. p. 345); (b) a case called "The One-Horse Dawn Experiment," begun as an experiment in thought-transference, but with some curious developments (see Mrs. Verrall's original account, *Proceedings*, vol. xx. and subsequent papers by Mr. Piddington and Sir Oliver Lodge in *Proceedings*, vol. xxx. pp. 175, 291, and 296); and (c) the experiments in thought-transference of Professor Gilbert Murray (*Proceedings*, xxix. p. 64, and xxxiv. pp. 212, 336—I myself being responsible for the editing of the two later series). I give these references fully because I do not propose to discuss Mr. Dingwall's article in detail, but should advise any persons interested in the subject, not to be satisfied with his somewhat sketchy and inadequate accounts of the evidence, but to refer to the original papers and judge for themselves what the evidence amounts to.

Mr. Dingwall's article seems to have been put together somewhat carelessly or hastily. I notice, for example, that he states on p. 40 *apropos* of cross-correspondences that "Unfortunately the greatest secrecy has been observed with regard to the identity of the various automatists. They are known under different pseudonyms. . . ." Now to the best of my belief there have been ten automatists concerned in cross-correspondences published under the auspices of members of "the group"—four writing under pseudonyms (viz. the Macs, Mrs. Forbes, Mrs. Holland, and Mrs. Willett), and six writing in their own names (viz. Mrs. Frith, Mrs. Lyttelton,<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Piper, Mrs. Salter, Mrs. Verrall, Mrs. Stuart Wilson). But of these the Macs, Mrs.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Lyttelton wrote as "Mrs. King" at first, but allowed her real name to be published in 1923.

Forbes, and Mrs. Frith come but very slightly into the question of cross-correspondences. Omitting these for the purposes of the present discussion we have two automatists writing under pseudonyms (Mrs. Holland and Mrs. Willett) and five writing under their own names. I am sorry we cannot relieve Mr. Dingwall of the burden of this amount of anonymity, but I think it will be agreed that it is hardly a fair description of it to say that "the greatest secrecy has been observed with regard to the identity of the various automatists." It is understood of course that there is no concealment of the identity of any of the automatists from those sponsoring the publication of their scripts.

However, this is something of a digression, as what I am specially concerned to discuss on this occasion, if the editor will allow me space, are certain conditions of investigation of telepathy, cross-correspondences, and the mental side of psychical research generally, which I think it important to bear in mind and which Mr. Dingwall seems sometimes to overlook. In such experiments and observations there is the inevitable condition that we have to deal with human minds, not with machines or chemical reactions, and that therefore we can never repeat experiments exactly. It is this, besides the comparative variety of the phenomena in an observable form, that makes progress in psychical research so slow. Not being able to repeat exactly, we can only accumulate evidence which, though not perfect, is as good as we can get, and comparing one case with another gradually discover perhaps what elements are essential and what not essential to the results. It is with this object that we are anxious to collect as many cases, experimental and spontaneous, as we can. And it is with this object that we sometimes, I fear, bore our fellow members by urging them to contribute their share to the investigation by sending us particulars of any case they hear of. No single experiment being in itself crucial or conclusive, and none being exactly repeatable, we require many slightly varying ones to convince the world. And, as a matter of fact, it is in this way that the world is gradually becoming convinced of the existence of, *e.g.*, telepathy. The attitude towards it now is very different from what it was when our Society was founded.

It is worth noticing that the kind of evidence on which our conclusions in psychical research are likely to be based is like-

wise the kind used in historical investigation, in legal investigation, and in a great deal of scientific investigation, and is also the kind by which we in fact conduct our ordinary mundane affairs. But in psychical research we suffer from a special difficulty, namely, that the facts our evidence has to establish are unusual facts—they are not the sort of fact which we instinctively recognise as being as likely to be true as not. For this sort of recognition familiarity is required, and here again the rarity of our phenomena makes our progress slow.

If it be asked why, if telepathy occurs at all, experiments in which a prescribed programme is exactly carried out cannot be produced; one obvious answer is to point to our ignorance about the telepathic process. A., for instance, who tries to transmit an idea to B. otherwise than through the channels of sense, sometimes succeeds, but does not know how he does it, or what circumstances, mental or external, help or hinder. Similarly B., who sometimes receives the intended idea otherwise than through his senses, does not know how it comes to him. This does not surprise me, because we have so little control over our mental processes. Who, for instance, has not struggled vainly to remember something—say a name—which he is certain he knows. He fails at the time but later, perhaps the next day, when he has ceased to think about it, it comes into his mind, *apropos* of nothing so far as he can judge. Whence came the difficulty?

All this is not intended to suggest that we should not, aided by the sensitive, secure the best conditions we can, and still less that we should not record the conditions that do obtain, with as much care as we can. But do not let us reject, or regard with undue suspicion, all experiments that are not evidentially perfect in a mechanical sense.

And this brings me to another result of our inability to repeat experiments exactly. It is that the value of the evidence depends inevitably on the *bona fides* of the persons concerned. We cannot escape this. Of course, as in ordinary life, if you know a man (or woman) personally, know the character and reputation he bears, know his work, and know his friends, you can form a good judgment as to whether he is likely to deceive you intentionally. A judgment so formed is not necessarily infallible. Very occasionally in ordinary life a trusted friend

fails us and proves unworthy of the trust placed in him. But this is very rare, and we do not find it necessary to view all persons we have to deal with with suspicion—indeed, civilised life could hardly be carried on if we did. But of course we cannot transfer intact to the outside public, our own confidence in the probity of this or that person sharing in our experiment—nor indeed in our own. As Dr. Henry Sidgwick said in an early presidential address to our Society (July 18th, 1883, *Proc.* vol. i. p. 250), “All records of experiments must depend, ultimately, on the probity and intelligence of the persons recording them; and it is impossible for us, or any other investigators, to demonstrate to persons who do not know us that we are not idiotically careless or consciously mendacious. We can only hope that within the limited circle in which we are known, either alternative will be regarded as highly improbable.”

ELEANOR MILDRED SIDGWICK.

II. *Vintras, hérésiarque et prophète.* By MAURICE GARÇON. Paris, Librairie critique Emile Nourry. 1928. 191 pages.

This book is interesting, though the seriously-minded psychical researcher will glean from it but little. Those phenomena or performances of the “heresiarch” which Maître Garçon narrates: alleged automatic writing and messages purporting to come from the highest religious entities of the Beyond (including St. Joseph, promoted by Vintras commander of a special Order of Knights in honour of the Virgin Mary [p. 98]), visions, “apports” and bleedings of Hosts, etc., have about them nothing evidential. Still other authorities have been inclined to attribute to Vintras levitations of Satanic origin<sup>1</sup>; and on the whole, and though M. Garçon thinks him an impostor, it is of course possible that if genuine mediumship or something like it exists, the Tilly-sur-Seulle “prophet” may have been one of the privileged few.

With the religious schism which Pierre-Eugène-Michel Vintras (1807-1875) created in the Roman Catholic Church of France, his prosecution, his imprisonment, his relations with Naundorf (the *soi-disant* Louis XVII. denounced by Pope Gregory XVI. as the “son of perdition” [p. 92]), etc., we are not concerned here. This very brief notice will therefore suffice. I should like, however,

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, M. O. Leroy in *La Levitation*.